

**Sermon Title: "Looking Back To Go Forward"**  
**The Rt. Rev. Robert C. Wright, Bishop - Episcopal Diocese of Atlanta**  
**Date: March 20, 2022**  
**Scripture: Luke 4:16-21**

**16** When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, **17** and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: **18** "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, **19** to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." **20** And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. **21** Then he began to say to them, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing."

**Sermon Summary**

We celebrate anniversaries by looking back. We look back to see where we have been and what we have come through. When we look back we may weep, gain clarity, or celebrate our resilience. We all carry a spiritual photo album with us. In it we keep our memories of God; however, God designed us to do more than look back. In God's grand design of us, God made us to be more than a repository of what God has already done. Our memories do not live in an isolated consciousness. Somehow in the genius of God, our memories are connected to our imaginations. God designed us to look back to God so we can look forward with God.

In the fourth chapter of Luke's gospel, we find Jesus fresh from the wilderness and His encounter with the devil - fresh from "social-distancing". We can imagine that Jesus' re-entry into His hometown prompted precious memories. He saw familiar faces and places. He returned to His community of faith. He returned to the place where he was born and raised. Before going forward, Jesus had to look back. And when Jesus looked back, He showed up, pitched in, and recited scripture from Isaiah: "the Spirit of the Lord has anointed me".

Jesus understood and so must we that what we call "church" was born in the imagination of God. It was Spirit-conceived and Spirit-authorized. It was God's idea first, and therefore it enjoys God's favor. God dreamed of placing people in pockets of the earth like a little yeast in a mound of dough. God dreamed of a people who love God not only with their lips, but also with their lives. God dreamed of a people committed to Jesus' ever-widening, friend-making campaign. What a high privilege to have been invited to be an ambassador by the author of the world, God, to join in His soul-saving work.

Looking back to God should result in enterprise - not simply nostalgia. In the same way that the windshield is larger than the rearview mirror in a car. At important inflection points in our lives like our church anniversary, it is important to look back to know *how* to go forward with God. Our "anamnesis" (remembering) must result in "kinosis" (the outpouring of oneself). Our adoration of God should result in oblation for God. Any glory we experience from the Holy Spirit should be turned into a "grind" of doing God's work. We

must establish a direct relationship between our heights of worship of God on Sunday and the lengths we will go for God on Monday.

As a church we have been and continue to be a great lighthouse of morality to the world. And still: to those who much has been given, much is required! Jesus did not simply share a biblical passage or give an inspired reading that day. Jesus said, “it is fulfilled in your hearing” (verse 21). When we say Amen to God, we declare that the scripture be fulfilled. It is a declaration that we are willing ourselves to the will of God. It is more than just a spiritual feeling. Fulfilled means: I am pleased to co-create with God; I find my contentment in serving God above all others; I am satisfied in my soul to increase God’s celebrity in the world with the gifts given unto me; I want to get something accomplished for God.

The height of spiritual maturity is to follow Jesus of our own volition: to offer ourselves to God without arm-twisting, browbeating, shaming, guilt, or obligation. This is the highest form of worship. We recognize this in our mission statement as it says: “we exist for individual growth and social transformation.” On our anniversary, let us repurpose ourselves toward our mission.

No matter how ordinary we may sometimes feel, let us remember how God does extraordinary works through the ordinary. The ordinary person in the ordinary circumstance moving by the grace of an extraordinary God is still the hope of the world. God used a little brown boy from Nazareth to change all eternity. God used a little brown boy from Atlanta to change a nation. With our yes, God can change a heart, a home, a city, a state, and the world!

### **Reflection Questions**

1. Looking back over your life, in what ways has God been real, able, good, or generous to you?
2. Looking back over our history, in what ways has God been real, able, good, or generous to our church family?
3. How have you transformed your “anamnesis” (remembering how God has moved in your life) into “kinosis” (the outpouring of yourself to God)?
4. Where has God placed you to be God’s ambassador?
5. How do you increase God’s celebrity in the world with the gifts God has given you?
6. What is the last thing you got accomplished for God?